

Introduction and Foreword

These pages have not been written today, and these thoughts have not been born recently: they have been organized for over quarter of a century; they could have appeared in print sooner barring hostile circumstances and calamities that put strong obstacles in their way. They had, therefore, to remain waiting for a chance to gather whatever limbs they squandered and parts they lost, for the events that delayed their publication did, at the same time, alter their organization.

As for the book's idea, this has long preceded its debates. It shone within my chest ever since my young days just like lightning shining among the clouds, and were boiling in my blood enthusiastically, searching for a straight avenue to stop Muslims at a deadline terminating their chaos and lifting the veil from their vision so that they might look at life more seriously and go back to the roots of their religion as they are enjoined to do.

It is only then that they will be able to make their strides to uphold the Rope of Allah all together under the banner which calls unto them to educate themselves and behave as dutiful Brethren strengthening each other.

But the sight of these brethren, who are linked to one another by one principle and one creed, has unfortunately been a violent controversy that gets heated during arguments, just as ignorant folks go to extremes, so much so that it seemed as if controversy in the methods of pursuing knowledge was an etiquette in debating, or a final resort. This, indeed, is enough reason for worry which calls for contemplation.

This, indeed, invites grief, agony and sorrow; so, what is the solution? What should be done? These circumstances have been plaguing us for hundreds of years, and these calamities have been endangering us from front and back, right and left. That is a pen twisted with barrenness once and harmed by greed another; partisanship pushes it once and once it permits itself to yield to emotion, and between this and that there is reason for embarrassment; so, what should we do? What is the solution?

I have been fed up with all this, and grief has filled my heart; therefore, I reached Egypt by the close of 1329 A.H. hoping to achieve my objective. I was inspired by the hope that I would succeed in satisfying

at least part of my desire and be in direct contact with someone with whom I might exchange my views. I hoped that by discussing useful advice, Allah might assist us in achieving our objectives in the land of Kinana (Egypt) and cure the persisting disease endangering Muslims with tearing them apart and plaguing their groups with dissension.

I have been able, Praise to Allah, to achieve that goal, for Egypt is a country which plants knowledge and the latter grows in it nurtured by sincerity and submission to the deeprooted Truth through the power of evidence. This distinguishes Egypt and puts it even above all its other unique distinctions.

There, my circumstances being good, my mind peaceful, my soul delighted, I was lucky enough to come in contact with one of its distinguished renowned personalities who possessed a broad mind, gentle manners, throbbing heart, vast knowledge and high honour which he rightly enjoyed due to the quality of his religious leadership.

How good are the spirits men of knowledge are known to have, how acceptable their sayings, and how prophetic their manners! As long as an 'alim is so well attired, he will always remain good and prosperous, people will be safe and blessed, and nobody will hesitate to voice his opinion or unveil his thought to him.

That was the renowned dignitary and Imam of Egypt, and such were our meetings for which we thanked the Almighty without an end or limit.

I complained to him about my worries, and he complained to me about similar worries and uneasiness, and it was a right hour for both of us to contemplate upon that which would, by the Will of Allah, unite ourselves and our nation. We have agreed, thereupon, that: both groups, i.e. the Shi'a and the Sunni, are Muslims who indeed follow the right religion of Islam, that they all are in unanimous agreement regarding the Prophet's message, that there is no basic difference among them on fundamental issues which would impair their adherence to the glorious principles of Islam, that there is really no dispute among them about the basic tenets except that which naturally occurs among *mujtahids* regarding some rules because of the latter's derivations from the Book or the Sunnah, the consensus, or the fourth proof, and that this does not in any way justify such a huge gap or bottomless pit. What then caused all of this dispute of which the flashes have been sparkling ever since there were two nouns: "Sunni" and "Shi'a"?

If we scrutinize the Islamic history and discern the beliefs, views and precepts which bred therein, we will come to know that the causing factor for this dissension is agitation for a particular belief, a defense of a theory, or partisanship for an opinion, and that the greatest dispute which has occurred to the nation is the dispute about Imamate, for there have never been more swords unsheathed because of an Islamic principle as they have been because of Imamate.

The issue of Imamate, then, has been among the most direct factors causing such a dissension. The various generations that differed among themselves concerning Imamate became used to being fond of such fanaticism, and such partisanship was created without precautions or care. Had either of these

groups looked into the explanations of the other in understanding eyes, not in those of a cursing antagonist, the truth would have then become very clear and morning light could have been noticed by all those who can see.

We have made it incumbent upon us to deal with this issue by looking into the arguments of both groups in order to thoroughly comprehend them, without being motivated by our own personal inclinations derived from environment, habit, or custom. Instead, we must be stripped of all emotions and fanaticism and aim at reaching the truth from its generally acclaimed route, and touch upon it. This may attract the attention of Muslims, bring tranquility of mind with its decided facts from us to them and put, by the Will of Allah, a definite deadlock.

We decided, therefore, that he would present his own question in writing so that I would provide him with my written answer stating the correct conditions and supported them by either reason or authenticated quotations from both groups.

Thus were all of our debates conducted, through the help of Allah, the Sublime and Mighty. Later on, we wanted to have them published so that we could enjoy the fruits of our labour purely seeking the pleasure of Allah, the Exalted, the Sublime, but cruel days and overcoming fates discouraged us, and maybe that was, after all, for the best.

I do not claim that these pages are confined to the texts composed then by us, or that any of the forthcoming statements is not written by my own pen. The circumstances that delayed their publication also altered their organization, as we said above. But the sessions concerning the issues we debated are included herein *verbatim* with some necessary additions called forth by counsel and guidance, or they may have been caused by the sequence of discussion without violating our mutual agreement.

I have today the same wish I had yesterday: that this book will cause reform and goodness. If it wins the attention and acceptance of Muslims, then that is a grace from my Lord, and that is what I wish for my labour to accomplish: I want nothing but reform, as much as I can get, and my success depends upon Allah; in Him do I trust, and unto Him do I return.

I present my book to each and every man of reason who pursues knowledge, to the keen researcher who is acquainted with the intricate facts concerning the quest for knowledge, and to the learned outspoken scholar whose speech is an authority on the sayings and practices of the Prophet (S), to the philosopher who has mastered the science of speech, and to each and every educated youth who is free from all chains or shackles, who can be depended upon for the new life of freedom: if all of these accept it, realizing the advantage therein, then I am most pleased.

I have painstakingly produced this book by providing its answers in the best way from all aspects, aiming thereby at inspiring the fairminded people with its thought and taste with evidences which do not leave out any probability, and arguments which do not permit any loophole. I have paid a special attention to the authentic evident texts and the sayings and practices of the Prophet (S), a care which has made this

book suffice for a library entirely well-equipped with the most precious books on Islamic theology, traditions, biographies, and the like.

The latter are all related to this most significant subject. I have applied therein a philosophy which is very well balanced and authentic, and methods which force anyone who is acquainted with such books to walk behind this work while they, I mean the lovers of the truth, are its own followers from its beginning till the last paragraph. If my book, therefore, is accepted by fair-minded readers, then this is exactly what I desire and for which I thank Allah.

As regarding my own self, I am well satisfied with this book, pleased with my life after it. It is, I believe, a work which must make me forget all that which has made me fed up: life's heavy burdens, the impoverishing worries of time, and the enemy about whom I complain to none but Almighty Allah; He alone is his Judge and Muhammad (S) his adversary. Forget about the looting called for in its own quarters...

I have also endured the calamities pouring like a flood from every direction, bearing woeful presentiments, combined with uneasiness and grief. But my life, which will be immortalized through this book, is one of mercy in this life and the life to come; within it my soul has been pleased and my conscience eased. Therefore, I implore to Allah to take my labour with acceptance and overlook my mistakes and faults; my reward for this book will inshaAllah be the benefit and guidance of believers.

Those who believe and do good deeds: their Lord guides them through their faith; rivers flow from beneath them in the Gardens of Immortality; their prayer therein is: "Lord! Glory to Thee!" and their greeting has peace therein, and they conclude their prayers with:

"All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds." (Qur'an, 10:9-10)

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